



New Global Partnership in Return to Work



ISSA Secretary General Hans-Horst Konkolewsky and NIDMAR Executive Director Wolfgang Zimmermann sign Memorandum of Understanding, June 10, 2013 in the Lecture Theatre at the Port Alberni campus of the Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences (PCU-WHS)

The International Social Security Association (ISSA) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with NIDMAR to better support the implementation of best practice Return to Work Guidelines developed by ISSA in collaboration with Rehabilitation International (RI) and the International Disability Management Standards Council (IDMSC).

The signing took place June 10 at the Port Alberni campus of Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences (PCU-WHS), with ISSA Secretary General Hans-Horst Konkolewsky and NIDMAR Executive Director Wolfgang Zimmermann doing the honours.

In a world where 70 to 80 percent of the population does not have access to adequate social security and social protection, Konkolewsky said his association has a double mission to promote social cohesion and economic development worldwide, while at the same time serving as a business network for social security administrations, helping them deliver timely and cost-effective services to the populations they cover.

“As part of that, ISSA has embarked on a project that we call the Centre for Excellence in Social Security Administration. It will consist of a number of guidelines for social security administrators,” Konkolewski said.

The Guidelines on Return to Work, Workplace Health Promotion, and the Prevention of Occupational Risks will be released in November at the ISSA World Social Security Forum, which takes place this year in Doha, Qatar.

“These will represent benchmarks in how to organize social security administrations successfully and will be based on best practices from around the globe.”

Konkolewsky said ISSA turned to NIDMAR to develop the RTW portion of the guidelines. Under the MOU, NIDMAR will become a member of ISSA and will collaborate on the development of standard training modules based on the RTW Guidelines and on the development of an ISSA strategy on training and consultancy services.

“As part of this capacity building process, besides the training modules, we will also be developing, with NIDMAR, a system of accreditation of training bodies and consultants in this field.”



Konkolewsky said NIDMAR will also take part in a joint research project to perform a cost-benefits analysis of RTW on a global scale, based in large part on the long-term experience in BC and Canada as a whole. "We will bring the experiences of Canada to the world. We look forward to doing that with a highly-esteemed partner which is NIDMAR, and which is this new university."

Calling it an honour and a privilege to be working with the UN agency, Zimmermann said the ISSA RTW Guidelines to which NIDMAR is contributing would play a pivotal role in supporting the implementation of the UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, Article 27 on Work and Employment.

"Persons with disabilities are very much disenfranchised around the world," Zimmermann said. "We will work collaboratively to make sure that the world sees that here is a best practice model designed to support Article 27."

The signing of the MOU came on the eve of the annual meeting of the member countries of the International Disability Management Standards Council (IDMSC) in Vancouver. Joining Konkolewsky for the Port Alberni visit were Dr. Mohammed Azman, Deputy Chief Executive of the Social Security Organization of Malaysia (SOCSO); and from the Occupational Health and Safety Council of Hong Kong, Executive Director Wah-shing Tang, Vice-Chair of the Board of Governors Dr. Alan Hoi-shou Chan, and Senior Consultant Dr. Winson Yeung.

Hong Kong joined the IDMSC in 2008 and Malaysia joined in 2011. Azman said, like Germany, his country has a single, national jurisdiction for social security and workers' compensation, so when SOCSO sought to improve its practices, Germany was a natural role model. "We learned from the DGUV, and from them we came to know about NIDMAR."

PERKESO chose the NIDMAR standards for case managers on a trial basis and the experiment proved successful. Azman said the Malaysian government has learned that the best form of social security is to get sick and injured workers back into the workplace, rather than simply to provide compensation.

"We now have a total of 31 CDMPs, and in the years to come, we hope to have more," he said, adding that PERKESO plans to send representatives to PCU-WHS for on-site training.



Azman said his agency is well placed to serve as a centre of excellence as neighbouring countries adopt and implement the new ISSA Guidelines. “What we have here today, in the collaboration between NIDMAR and ISSA, is one of the milestones in moving forward in DM.”

Konkolewsky said that following the release of the Guidelines, ISSA will begin implementation of the program in summer 2014, offering training to ISSA member organizations worldwide.

“This goes very well hand-in-hand with the plans and developments of this university, and we very much look forward to this task. What we are talking about is to help our members to improve the livelihood and the quality of life of millions of people around the globe that are affected by ill health and by injuries due to accidents or other reasons, by helping them come back to work as soon as possible.”